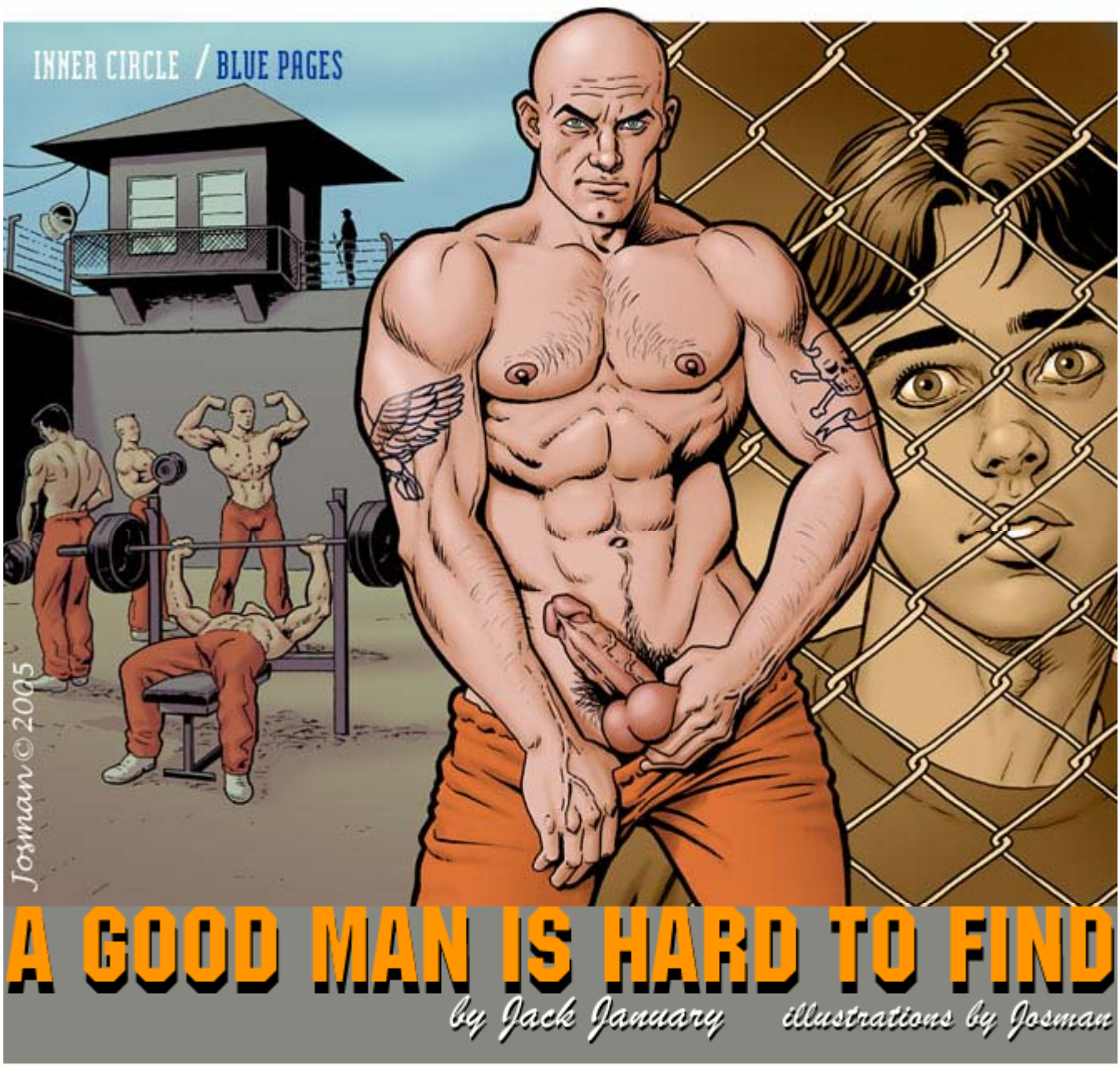


Juan, though he had been warned not to, took the shortcut anyway.

It would run him past the scary house, as he used to call the penitentiary by the river when he was a kid, a morose fortress wrapped in barbed wire and accented at its four corners by guard towers. His supple minibike kicked up grit as he buzzed along the dirt trail, catching gold light on his face wherever the cypress trees cleared. The sky was in the last glories of a sunset, but the air here was heavy swamp air, Everglades air, and the river was so brackish that it sucked in the colors and gave back, only grudgingly, a black counterfeit of the sky.

The alarm blasted in the distance, as it always did around this time, calling the inmates in from the rock quarries and the orange orchards. The kids Juan grew up with used to get on their bikes and race down this forbidden trail just to catch sight of the jailbirds marching back in a ragged line. The boys would lean off their bikes with their hands clawed on the link fence, peering through the two layers of barbed wire beyond.

Each kid had his favorite guard. Big-bellied bubbas sloshing wads of chewing tobacco from one side of their mouths to the other, the guards would put on a show when they saw their half-pint audience arrive. Prisoners now got poked and prodded with a zeal that would not be out of place on a cattle drive. Leaning low over their horses, the guards would drawl out profanities of such inventiveness that the boys would hoot and blush right up to the tops of their ears. Like a flock led by a preacher, they picked up the chant: "You shit-maggot piece of human waste!" The convicts never flinched. Their faces, sun-seared and sun-hardened, seemed immune to shame.

Razzing the convicts at Scary House, as the Cleary ("Big House") Penitentiary was known, was a rite of passage for every boy in Ocalaka, and it was during this rite that Juan discovered he was different from the others. The guards, who would sometimes wink at their fans after a particularly degrading zinger, repelled Juan. He was too much of a team-player not to tag along but quietly he knew. This was cruel sport, unmanly and unfair, an exercise in malice masquerading as righteousness. "It's only what those killers and baby-rapers deserve," someone in his group had crowed as if voicing the obvious. Juan could only manage a sickly smile.

The shrill alarm sounded a second time just as Juan zipped past the crossroad that led up to the prison. Then, unexpectedly, the whistle wailed again. Three times for supper? -- that was peculiar. Juan glanced over his shoulder toward the gates and remembered the day his childhood ended. It had given way like a trap door, plunging him down with an electric thrill into a world of secret feelings and lingering gazes.

He remembered the gaze, the crafty blue eyes, and the stroke of the hand. Juan had been leaning into the link fence, watching the cons in the exercise pen. The others were jeering as usual but the convicts went on curling dumbbells, pressing weights, their muscles and tattoos glinting with sweat. One of the boys yelled at a humongous hulk, grimacing under a load that made the barbell bend. "Hey, Hercules, what y'all think you're building? You ain't going nowhere. Not for one hundred years!"

Suddenly a bruiser came right up against the barbed wire. The boys hadn't seen him by the punching bag, which continued to sway from the beating he had given it. Mistaking Juan for the wise guy, he sized him up with a dismissive snort. Juan was not a bad-looking kid. He had a sleepy sort of face, sensual, with a puffy lower lip passed on to him by a remote Cuban grandmother. "Why don't you bring that pretty little mouth over here, son," the con said, yanking on the voluptuous roll in his sweat

pants. With a jab, he pulled down the waistband, giving Juan an eyeful of succulent, mushroom-headed cock. The boys jumped back, including Juan, and in a riot of bicycles, everyone wheeled out of there. "You know you want it, bitch," the con had called after him.

Juan never went back to Scary House again. His daydreams, though, often found him lingering around the link fence. Through the waning days of senior high, right up to the present, the October of his 18th year, Juan would no sooner shut his eyes over a schoolbook but he'd see the lean, wolfish face of the convict, relive the thrill of being completely sized up, held by a gaze filled with canine cunning -- an ability to read people in a blink, to work them, manipulate them, turn them to its needs.

"Lord, I'm so glad you come by!"

Juan was surprised to hear a voice this deep in the swamp. By the side of a palmetto tree stood a skinny boy not much older than Juan, doing the best he could to cover his nakedness. "My crazy friends drove off with my clothes, you believe that!" He had a sing-song, backwoods twang and what Juan thought of as a dunce haircut, bangs straight across the forehead, favored by rural Southern boys. "I went for a swim and --"

"In that there water!" Juan, like everyone else hereabouts, had been raised on horror stories about alligators and parasites." In that sickly Everglades water!"

"Man I was so fucked up I didn't know nothing. You believe that? And the somabitches stole my clothes!" The boy kept his hands cupped over his genitals as his voice climbed. "Ha ha! Big fun. Some joker's always doing me like that." He shook his head forlornly. "I can't go into town like this. Listen, I'll trade you a bottle of whiskey for your underwear. I sure will. It's powerful homemade shit! Come on. My name is Duncan. What's yours."

Juan flipped down the kickstand and got off his minibike. "Juan," he said agreeably.

"A Spanish boy!" The boy's eyes brightened with glee. "I didn't take you for no Cuban! Well, Juan, you're a lucky man." The boy exhaled whiskey vapors as he leaned in. "I love Cubans! And they love me! All the time! I promise you that. Let's get off the road and change clothes. Leave your bike be. It'll be okay for a minute."

Juan led the way into the dense grove, with the boy chattering behind him. The bog was a tangle of roots and hanging creepers, with the mangrove trees all twisted up and massed so close that it was always eerie twilight here. Out in the marsh, a heron cried in the forlorn way of the Everglades. Too late Juan saw the clump of orange amid the sawgrass. A blow from behind brought him to the ground, beside the discarded prison jumpsuit. Duncan had jumped on his back, twisting his arm behind him. "Come on out, Daddy," he called. "Come see what I brung you." A large,

disheveled man stepped from behind a willow festooned with Spanish moss. He held a whiskey bottle and wore an orange jumpsuit.

"Strip him," the man ordered, tugging on his dick as he hurried toward them. Duncan yanked Juan up by the hair and the man spun him around, clamping a forearm around his chest and a heavy, calloused hand across his mouth. Juan felt the sandpaper chin dig into his neck.

"Mmm," the man growled in his ear. "Warm boy smell." It was a dark-stained voice, cured in whiskey and tobacco smoke, coming from a hoarse place in the throat. Yet there was something about the way he said it, like a caress, the rush of breath battering the hairs in Juan's ear, that made Juan's lean, yieldingly, against him.

The mind is a surprising and flexible thing. The unrealness of what had just happened unmoored Juan from the realities of what was likely to happen next. He felt only an exhausted relief. The danger from his daydreams had crossed, finally, into this world with no visible loss. It was here now, in the twilight, in the bog, as real as the greenish mist rolling in along the peat. But what was this thrill radiating through his buttocks? Like a flower that had unfurled, Juan realized he was hard.

The man nuzzled deeper into Juan's shoulder. "I love warm boy smell," he said darkly, and sniffed the hair at the nap of his neck. "Soap smell, too."

Duncan, on his knees undoing the boy's belt, squinted up at him. "You clean inside and out, Juan?" Juan, too stunned to struggle, was also unable to locate an answer. He looked down at the naked boy helplessly. The pink body seemed so far below him, as if Juan were not in his body at all, but floating about it.

"Hey, don't go stir on me, stud," groused Duncan, tugging at the jeans, working them until the denim settled around Juan's calves. The man had pulled down the back of Juan's boxer shorts, groaning in his ear, reeking whisky breath, as he explored the contours of the exposed ass. Finding the most private spot, he entered the interior with blunt, circling fingers. Juan shivered.

Duncan was now eye-level with the paisley shorts. "What have we here," he asked, rubbing the stiffened knob through the material. Gently he brought it out, his head at a languorous tilt, examining the pink slit peeking through the brown, satiny fold. He touched it with the tip of a finger; that's all it took for pearls to form. Duncan brought the glistening glob to his lips in a long, looping string of pre-cum.

"May I, Daddy?." bleated Duncan. "May I?"

The reply was harsh. "First take care of me."

The dunce-haired boy seemed not to hear, Fixedly, he eyed the brown beauty, which had puffed out and taken on a life of its own, jerking upward with each catching

intake of air. Juan's breaths were now coming in short, automatic stabs of sound. Duncan put one hand on the flatness of Juan's stomach and hovered closer.

The man slapped Duncan away. "Eat my ass out first," he demanded.

Duncan's expression went waxy. He cricked his neck. Obliviously, the dunce-head lolled from side to side as he examined Juan's lovely, pert balls, which like his rounded buttocks, were firmly held, buoyant. Cupping both hands beneath their rosy plumpness, grazing the hairs but not touching, Duncan seemed to gaze into them as he spoke. "May I, Daddy?" he pleaded in a weird, little-girl voice." *Please*."

Juan felt his head swimming -- he should, he really should say something now. But all he could do was look down on the scene becalmed, like a ship entangled in seaweed, enmeshed, not by choice, in someone else's strange and private life.

Duncan's voice disappeared into a teeny-tiny whisp. "Oh, Daddy, *Daddy*." It seemed now that something in Duncan broke because all at once, savage, furious eyes flashed up at the man. "May I!" he roared, turning as red as a welt." May I, you scumbag panhandling misfit!"

And in a blink, Duncan had gobbled down the cock, greedily swiveling it with angry thrusts and bites, just as the man jack-hammered a handful of fingers up Juan's asshole as if, in this way, he might reach through Juan and batter Duncan. Juan went off like a firecracker. He hung on a breath as the rollercoaster dipped and dipped and kept dipping with each wild spray of the sparks shooting out of him.

It took him seconds to catch his breath, and when he did, Juan began to laugh, giddy, light-headed. If the Daddy man did not hold him tight, he would surely break with gravity and bob along the ground like a day-old helium balloon. Isn't this what he had been dreaming of, isn't this what he wanted?

"I want to go home now," he heard a flat voice say and realized it must have come from him.

Duncan reared back with closed eyes and ran his tongue across his lip, rocking away in his own world. Abruptly he came back. With a newly honeyed voice, he said, "Get out of that pumpkin suit, Daddy. Me and town boy here will eat your ass out."

Duncan took charge of Juan when the man let go. Finding no resistance in the captive, he pressed his lips to the boy's ear. "I won't let him hurt you," he whispered and flicked his tongue into the groove. "You're a good boy."

Suddenly Duncan leaned back and frowned at Juan skeptically. "You *are* a good boy?"

Juan shook his head in time with the stabbing breaths. But he was miles away. He was ... with June Starr, of all people! June Starr, "the school slut" as she liked to introduce herself, had cornered him at a party and gone down on him. He couldn't even get it up. "Don't worry, baby," she had said afterwards, mussing his hair. " I won't tell the other boys your secret."

"Get busy," the man demanded as he stood before them. His big, barrel-chested body was matted with hair and his prong of a dick curved upward so dramatically that Juan could see the shaft below purpled with a master vein. The man had one of those angry-looking cut dicks, where the head is redder and more agitated then the shaft as if still in a rage over being circumcised. Duncan pulled the dazed boy down and they both knelt side by side. From this dog's eye view, everything about the man seemed blunt-ended, the dirty-nailed fingers, the unshaven jaw, the sweeping wings of the dick-head that was suspended just above Juan's eyes like a meat hook.

"Give us that big, dirty ass, Daddy."

The man turned and bent low, sticking out his ponderous ass. He pushed it out so far that he needed to brace his thighs with his hands. Duncan separated the cheeks, which were marbleized with dark hairs, then turned to Juan. "I'm gonna give you a high honor, town boy. This is Daddy's favorite thing in the whole world. Hey, anybody home?" He tapped Juan on the forehead, which startled Juan. Juan looked back at the dunce-haired boy, puzzled. "You're so scared it's sweet. You're a good boy, ain't you," Duncan asserted. But again, he narrowed his eyes as if unsure. "You *are* a good boy?"

"I am a good boy," Juan repeated in a blank, automatic way.

Duncan nodded, satisfied. "You're not like the others," he stated with a superior sniff. "You're going to walk away from here today. Now mind me, boy!" Again pressing the furry cheeks to either side, Duncan extended a skinny, rolled-up tongue and, closing his eyes, immersed himself, jabbing the pink tongue like the rapid needle of a sewing machine, getting quickly lost in the lesson, slurping, gnawing, bouncing about so enthusiastically that the man's low-hanging balls began to slap around like two eggs in a sack. Impulsively, Juan slipped his hand between the man's legs and grabbed on to the unseen dick. It was tantalizingly heavy, like an industrial garden hose. Daddy moaned.

"Get over here, freak," the man called over his shoulder.

Duncan pulled out and winked at Juan. "I love when he calls me that." He rubbed his chest extravagantly, slipping one hand over Juan's dick, catching up foreskin which slid with the motion. "Come on, Juan, " he urged in a husky voice. "Take a walk on the wild side."

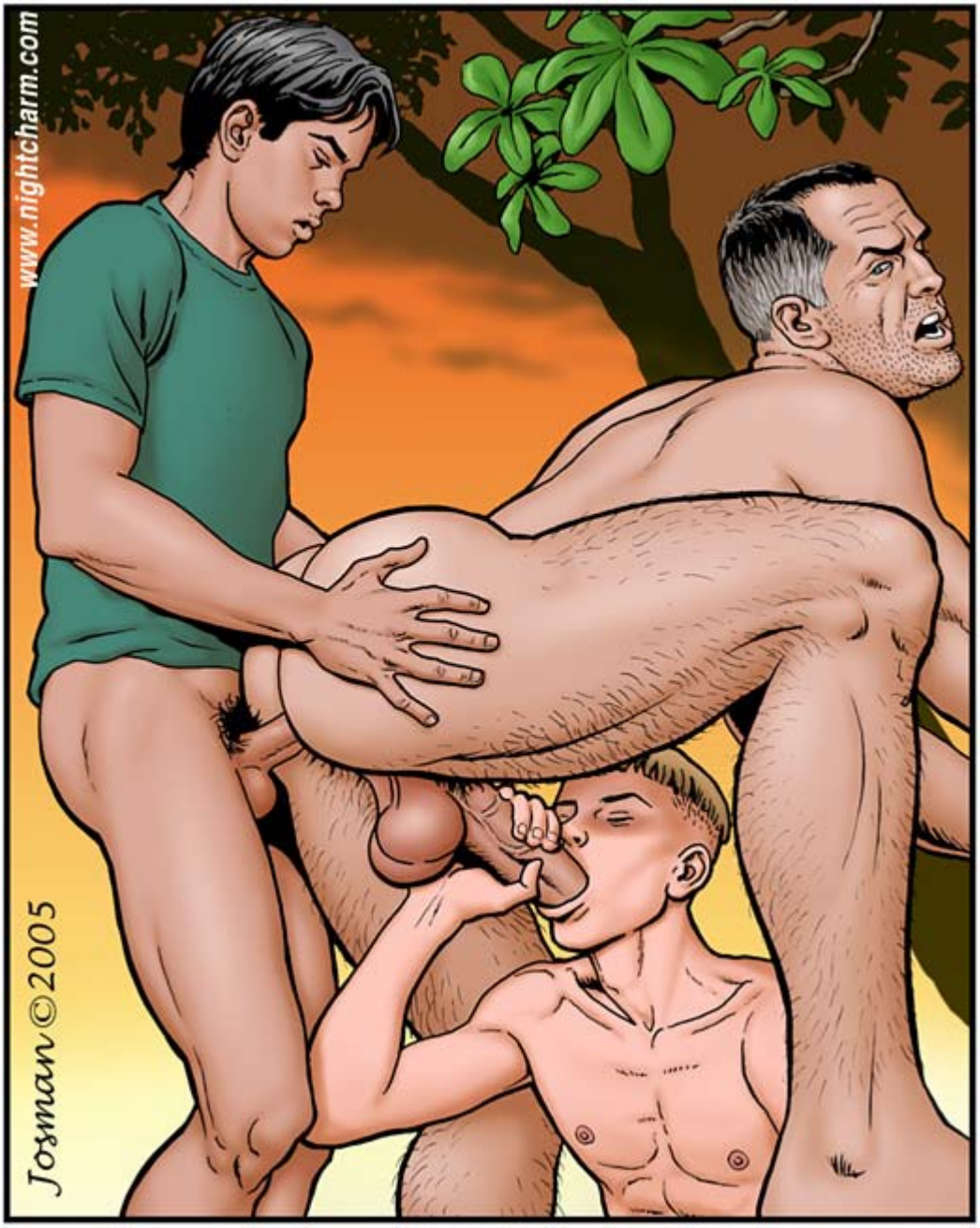
The meaty hemispheres parted between Juan's hands. The hole lay there like the center of a bullseye, puckered, reddened, raw from Duncan's attack. It pulsed, as if beckoning, and powerfully Juan felt himself drawn into its tight rosebud. He went in tentatively, testing the entrance with a swirl of his tongue. The bitter tang made him gag, but Duncan jacked him so relentlessly, pushing in to the base of his cock, that Juan burrowed in deeper. The man immediately pushed back with force, grinding his ass in wide, sloppy circles that Juan rode, battering the hole at times with the butt of his chin, moaning now himself. He felt faint fingers tweak his nipples. "He likes it, Daddy, " Duncan called out, then whispered in the boy's ear, not unkindly, "That's the hot spic in you! Y'all love that *culo*!"

Juan's face was knocked aside as the ass turned. He looked up, surprised. The man stared down with cold, dead eyes and Juan wondered if he had been too rough, had done it wrong, if now -- the reality crashing through -- they would kill him.

"Fuck me." the man said thickly. Juan was certain he had not heard right. Had the man just said *no* -- wasn't it supposed to work the other way? Hadn't the convict at the fence always penetrated him? Searching for something to anchor his thoughts, he fastened on the flipped-up dick. The forked vein pulsed steadily. "Fuck me!" the man demanded and pulled Juan up on his feet. He got right up in his face. "You think you're too good for me, town boy? Fuck me, you son of a bitch, or we'll get this thing over with right here!"

Alarmed, Juan nodded rapidly, just as Duncan put a gentle arm around his shoulder. "I won't let him hurt you," he whispered. "Leave everything to me." The man again got into position, his ass high in the air. Duncan seemed to guess Juan's secret, that he had never done this before, not with man or woman. Smoothly, the dunce-haired boy maneuvered Juan into place, guiding his dick between his hands, sliding the foreskin back and forth until the brown beauty was slick with its own pre-cum.

And it seemed now that Juan's dick had a mind of its own. Never having lost its erection, it sunk into the asshole with a full-probing thrust. It was hot and thrilling, this smothering grip as if Juan had forced his way into a tight leather glove. A woozy languor filled him as his thighs took over, slapping into the ass with building rhythm. He grabbed onto the man's sides and picked up speed. Some automatic force was taking the helm, some nature he had not known but which knew him and this act well. With thrusts growing more extravagant, he plowed through the pliant corridor, fucking hard, fucking deep, fucking something wild that thrust up to meet him, wrenching his dick, raging with its own desire, a furnace of hunger.



The jolting motion blurred his vision as Juan looked about and discovered that Duncan was no longer at his side. He heard him up front, slurping, whimpering, gagging all over the Daddy cock. He could make a run for the trees now, should make a run, except there was no possibility of running, no possibility of stopping, no life but this one, no future but the present. With a sudden sweep of his arm, he hugged Daddy to him and came in great, gulping strokes.

"Yeah," the man rumbled lustily, for he too was spurting. Soon the only sound was Duncan twacking away as he grunted on the dick in his mouth. A wad of come shot out of him, arcing high through the man's legs, and splashed down onto Juan's calf. Juan look at it for a long moment, but did not bother to wipe it off.

It was over.

The man had stepped into his jumpsuit, which he was now buttoning. He glanced back at Juan with eyes that were cold, dead, all business. "Take his clothes," he told Duncan, but Duncan made a sign on the sly for Juan to pull up his jeans. "Not yet, Daddy." Duncan said, walking over to his own jumpsuit lying in a clump on the sawgrass. He began to put it on.

"What you doing that for, Duncan!"

"Too damp out here in these swamps for no flimsy t-shirt. You know how delicate I am. Besides, Juan told me he wants to party some more."

"And *when* exactly did he tell you that?"

"Told me with his eyes. Clear as a bell. That hunger in his eyes goes right through to his soul."

A branch cracked loudly. "Arms in the air!" From out of the brush stepped a guard in a broad-brimmed hat, his rifle trained on the men. A moment later he was joined by a roly-poly guard picking his way through the tangled roots.

"Bailey and O'Connor," the second guard said jocularly, his pistol drawn. "Now how'd I know we'd find you two here?"

"Because I made sure you'd see that motorbike I left for you out in the road," Duncan replied. "Fact, what took you so long? You boys couldn't catch a cold!"

"Why do you do it, Duncan," said the first guard, slapping on the handcuffs.

"Cause I can," mewed Duncan.

When he and O'Connor had been chained together with leg irons, the first guard stood up and shook his head. "You sure must love solitary."

"What Duncan loves is terrifying local boys, " the roly-poly officer said.

"Yes I do," the young convict agreed. "I think of it as payback. Karma. *Revenge*."

The officers lowered their hats to hide their grins. It was plain they liked the skinny boy, despite themselves.

"You know how it is," Duncan continued. "Marriage is such a drag. We need *some* variety. Course we wouldn't have to break out so often if you boys came around to visit. Look at them blushing," he said to Juan. "Why, Officer John Wesley, you drop about 300 pounds and you'd be one hell of a man. A real Three-Alarmer!"

When the convicts had been carted off and Juan had convinced the officers that he was okay, a bit shook up but basically unharmed, he promised to report to the station

the next morning, when he was really calm, and give a statement. The officers offered him a lift back to town. Juan said he wasn't going to town, he was taking a shortcut somewhere else. Besides, he didn't want to leave his minibike in the swamp overnight. "The big guy was going to kill me," he was surprised to hear himself confide.

"O'Connor?" marveled Officer John Wesley, his porcine face slack with disbelief. "That ole boy was an accessory in a bank robbery where somebody got killed. He wouldn't hurt nobody unless it was a bank. It's that Duncan Bailey, now; he's the serial killer. Slit the throats of a string of boy whores in New Orleans. He hates them. He was one! Don't get Duncan started on morality! He has ideas about good and bad that would make your hair stand on end!"

Juan and the officer emerged from the brush, and as soon as he saw them, Duncan rapped on the window at the back of the squad car. In the evening darkness, mosquitoes were hurling themselves pointlessly against the glass. "You're a good man, Juan," Duncan called, a bit muffled by the barrier. "Don't change. A good man is hard to find these days.

Juan sat on his minibike a while after the car drove off. Night had fallen, and the trail was illuminated narrowly by the beam from his headlight. He had taken a shortcut. A dangerous shortcut, but nothing is for nothing. Juan didn't think he would be haunted anymore by the convict at the link fence. He sat there for a moment rubbing the ear that had so recently been licked and caressed. He thought what he might really like now was a man, good or bad, to love. Juan stood up in his seat and revved the motor, then followed the narrow path out of the swamp.